**In Age of Tweets, Teachers Hammer the Grammar**

**By Stephen J. Pytak, *Republican & Herald*, Pottsville, Pa. (MCT)**

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In the age of Facebook posts, emoticons and tweets, English grammar may seem like it's on the road to extinction.

"One of the more apparent problems we see in student writing is a carry-over of 'texting' language," Leslie Kraft, a ninth-grade English teacher at Pottsville Area, said Wednesday.

Brandon Kessock, a Pottsville Area freshman, said he's experienced it.

"Texting affects us a lot. I get so used to texting that I mess up a lot of easy words. Instead of 'what' I type 'wat.' Using my phone affects my grammar more than I ever knew," Kessock said.

Meghan Cleary, a freshman at Pottsville Area, said texting and messaging on social media have an impact on the way young people use grammar.

"It has affected them negatively because people often do not fully spell out words and add extra letters when texting or messaging. Sometimes when I switch papers to edit in class, I find my partner using text messaging words. However, it has affected people positively too. I see people on Twitter and Facebook commenting to correct spelling or grammar mistakes. People often mess up 'your' and 'you're' or 'they're,' 'there' and 'their,'" Cleary said.

Today is National Grammar Day. It's held each year on March 4 to promote the use of good grammar, writing and speaking skills in everyday life. It was started in 2008 by Martha Brockenbrough, founder of the Society for the Promotion of Good Grammar, according to [**nationalgrammarday.com**](http://nationalgrammarday.com/).

In observance, local teachers and other experts in education offered their perspectives last week on how grammar should be taught in public schools.

State standards are going to get tougher, said Tim Eller, press secretary for the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

"The department is preparing to release new standards for all students and they are clearly more rigorous than those of 30 years ago. In addition, these standards will apply to all students, not just college-bound," Eller said.

Beginning July 1, 2013, following full implementation of a transition plan to be developed by the department in collaboration with education stakeholders, academic standards will be based on the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects, according to The Pennsylvania Code at [**pacode.com**](http://pacode.com/).

What will remain the same, however, is teachers will still be able to develop their own curriculums, and decide whether or not to incorporate exercises like diagramming sentences, Eller said.

Mignon Fogarty, Reno, Nev., author of "Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing," said it's important for teachers to make the subject interesting.

"Keeping them engaged in whatever way you can should be the best way to teach grammar. I like to use humor in my podcasts, and we've gotten great feedback on the 'Correct the Celebrity' worksheets on the National Grammar Day website. It's more fun for a student to consider grammar in the context of a Justin Timberlake quotation than from a textbook or made-up example," Fogarty said Thursday.

Dr. Michael W. Smith, Philadelphia, a professor of literacy education at Temple University and co-writer of the book "Getting It Right: Fresh Approaches to Teaching Grammar, Usage and Correctness," isn't a fan of diagramming sentences.

"It doesn't do any good. Diagramming sentences only teaches students how to diagram sentences," Smith said.

But Breanne Frandsen, an English teacher at Pottsville Area's D.H.H. Lengel Middle School, is an advocate of that method.

When Frandsen was a student at Pottsville Area, her teachers weren't using it.

"There was a phase where there was a focus completely on writing, where we did compositions and we did grammar through writing in middle school," Frandsen said.

After graduating from Pottsville Area in 2003, she learned to diagram sentences at Shippensburg University, where she graduated in 2007.

"Now at Pottsville Area we are trying to get back to teaching the grammar first, then encourage them to do compositions and editing. They start students in elementary school with a simple plot diagram," Frandsen said.

Students can learn how to diagram sentences on a website developed by the faculty of the Wisconsin Technical College System called [**wisc-online.com**](http://www.wisc-online.com/default.aspx).

"Diagramming sentences has not been much in vogue as a pedagogical device for the past 30 years or so. There are, however, many grammarians and English instructors who hold that analyzing a sentence and portraying its structure with a consistent visual scheme can be helpful," according to the online [**Guide to Grammar and Writing**](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/) sponsored by the Capital Community College Foundation, Hartford, Conn.

Not all teachers at Pottsville Area use these diagrams.

"As a student and early in my teaching career, grammar instruction consisted mainly of memorizing grammatical elements, like gerunds, appositives and participles, and doing worksheets to practice identifying these parts," Kraft said.

"Some teachers have experimented with diagramming as a means of helping visual learners, but we pretty much stick with our philosophy of teaching the grammar and writing together," said Suzanne Sterner, an English teacher at D.H.H. Lengel.

"That allows students to use and apply what they learn, rather than just focusing on memorization," Kraft said.

Smith believes it's the best way to teach grammar.

"It's important to put students in situations where they get an immediate payoff for using grammar skills," Smith said.

While new technology brings new challenges, it also offers educators new tools, Kraft said.

"There are a variety of applications for the Apple iPad which help students to improve their writing skills. Additionally, research shows that students become better writers by reading texts they enjoy. Thus, a major component of our overall English curriculum is devoted to connecting students with appropriate texts and creating life-long readers," Kraft said.

Savvy Facebook users who like their posts to be clear and concise use a grammar checker at [**facebook.com/grammarly**](https://www.facebook.com/grammarly).